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# Opinions of German Activist Parties in Czechoslovakia 1918-1938

A contribution to the question of Czech-German coexistence  
in inter-war Czechoslovakia

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**Abstract:** Sudeten German activism was formed through co-operation within the system of Czechoslovak democracy. Three Sudeten German parties were engaged in activist politics, despite the fact that many of their expressed convictions contained elements of the anti-democratic thought that was to become the root of National Socialism. The activist political parties, as represented by their leading politicians, accepted the democratic system as the basis of their existence, but the anti-democratic thinking that permeated their views, proved impossible to reconcile with the Czechoslovak notion of democracy. In 1935, among Sudeten Germans there was a tide of feeling of apurtenance to the German nation and widespread dissatisfaction resulting from the impact of the global economic crisis on those regions of Czechoslovakia settled by Germans. This paved the way for Henlein's nationalist party and later Hitler.

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The question of the attitudes of Germans in the First Czechoslovak Republic and the development of their status from the time of the Munich Agreement up until their transfer (in the German view expulsion [*Ausseidlung*] or banishment [*Vertreibung*]) has played a sensitive political role in Czech-German relations up until the present day. The call for conciliation, which is not something historically new (it first arose during the time of the Second Czechoslovak Republic [Rataj 1998]), is something that continues to agitate mutual relations.

As far as the First Republic is concerned, the continuing historical-political argument on the issue can be expressed by the question as to how far Czech Germans (as German inhabitants of the Czech lands were known<sup>1</sup>) were prepared – as a result of their status in the state, which they considered to be bad – to participate in the breaking up of the Czechoslovak state. To put it another way, we may ask what kind of society or rather community was demanded by the Germans, who did not become a part of the open Czech society as characterised by K. Popper, and whose constant demand was for isolation from the Czechs.<sup>2</sup>

Masaryk's "Successful political system (...) assumes the consent of the citizens to the main way of political deportment" [Masaryk 1994: 334]. This "consent" is nothing less than a fundamental democratic consensus, the positive attitudes of the citizens to-

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1) *Deutschböhmer, Deutschmährer, Deutschschleisier.*

2) Seminar held by Sir Karl Popper at the Prague College of the Central European University. Similar demands for isolation were also put forward by Germans in South Tyrol, which was incorporated into Italy after the First World War.

wards the political system and its components as expressed by a political culture enabling the functioning of democratic societies.

The rejection of the overwhelming majority (90%) of the Sudeten Germans of democratic Czechoslovakia after the impact of the global economic depression on these inhabitants itself contains the assumption that the bonds of the German national minority to democratic values were not very strong. There had been no departure from democracy or any inclination towards extremist anti-parliamentarian parties in any of the older democracies with long traditions of parliamentarism. Yet this occurred in Germany and Austria [Berg-Schlosser 1987: 251]. My previous analyses of the functioning of the political system of inter-war Czechoslovakia and particularly the comparison of the Czechoslovak and German political systems [Broklová 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1995] also legitimise the thesis that, from the point of view of Czech-German coexistence, it was a question of the coexistence of two communities with disparate political cultures and a strong national cleaving tendency founded on the discrepancy of the principles of citizenship and nation. *The cleavage of civil versus national* in Czech-German coexistence also concentrated within itself other, classical Rokkanov cleavages to various extents; the centre versus the periphery, religious versus secular, and town versus country. These basic cleavages and also other discrepancies brought about by them were consensually soluble by the internal resources of the democratic political system of the Czechoslovak Republic. In the small state that was Czechoslovakia, however, the solubility of these cleavages in the context of a democratic system depended on the existence of external democratic environments. The undemocratic inter-war development of the neighbouring countries, however, and the strengthening revisionist policies of a number of them, in particular Germany, directly aspired to this cleaving.

While the problems of the different political cultures of the Czechs and Germans and their circumstances were nothing foreign to the contemporaries of inter-war Czechoslovakia (Josef Holeček [1919], Karel Kramář [Vencovský 1992], Emanuel Rádl [1933, 1935, 1993], T. G. Masaryk [1994 and others], Edvard Beneš [1932], Kamil Krofta [Krofta a Sobota 1937], Emanuel Chalupný [1935] and others), this area of research was quite neglected in later historiographic works, and Czech-German relations were interpreted only as nationalist antipathies. In the study of Czech-German relations, scant attention has been afforded to political culture, the research of which can best answer the question raised above.

The problem of the coexistence of Czechs and Germans calls directly for such kind of analysis: In the period of successful consolidation of the democratic system after the parliamentary elections of 1925, when the majority of German voters (69%) voted for German political parties that had established links with Czechoslovak parties in the first half of the 20th century, German nationalists declared – in a democratic state in which members of all nationalities were considered citizens – that: “We will never recognise the Czechs as masters. We will never consider ourselves slaves in this state.” [*Národní...* 1928: 356]. Four years later, as many as 71% of German voters gave their votes to German activist parties. In 1935, two years after Hitler’s rise to power in Germany and National Socialist activities among ‘Czech Germans’, 60% of German voters enabled Henlein’s Sudeten German Party, operating in the spirit of National Socialism, to become the most powerful German party. This raises the question of whether German voters’ attitudes towards democracy and value orientations met the requirements for acceptance into a democratic society? What led the policies of the activist parties to pay lip-service to

their participation in the legislative, and executive powers? And why did the majority of the German population yield to an ideology emanating and disseminated from Germany?

Political culture expresses the value orientation of the population and its attitudes towards the political system with all its institutions. It is related to the subjective dimension of politics. What then was the political culture of the Sudeten Germans, as they (not entirely truthfully) called themselves? Their rejection of democracy is part of a wider trend, characteristic of the period in which it appeared, during which democracy in Czechoslovakia had reached its zenith. Political culture, according to the majority of analyses, is a decisive factor in the orientation, character and quality of a political system. It was also a significant factor in the development of Czechoslovak democracy. The attempts of democratic politicians, particularly the founder of the state, President T. G. Masaryk, were directed towards building firm foundations for the coexistence of Czechs and Germans in a democratic state. Due to unfavourable developments abroad, in particular the German foreign policy aimed at altering the post-war status quo, in the given twenty-year period these attempts met with failure. The limited time was too short for fundamental changes to occur in the value attitudes towards democracy of both the majority of German politicians and the German population.

The 'marriage of reason', as the period of activist politics in Czechoslovakia is often termed, particularly in the initial period, was analogous to the attitude of the German Weimar politicians – labelled 'Republicans by reason' – towards the Republic. The Germans, including the activists, changed little in their emerging negative position towards the Czechoslovak state, as determined by their political culture (in particular, anti-democratic thinking). The Czechs, who had founded a democratic state, held onto their conception because of their political culture. However, it was the anti-democratic thinking found in the sources driving the activities of the activist parties, which became part of Nazi ideology.

From the large quantity of source material studied, two statements most aptly characterise the substantive Czech and German attitudes towards democracy: one from a German at the turn of the 1920's, and one from a Czech at the end of the following decade. On July 25th, 1919, Professor Robert Mayr-Harting, a leading Christian-Socialist politician, wrote to a Prague German newspaper an article entitled "The First Step". The article was intended to provide a stimulus to Czech government circles to establish contact with the Germans. In it the author interprets their view of the promise of equal rights for the Germans: "But what do they mean by this? It appears, again and again (...) only the equal rights of individual citizens (...) and now there are not to be equal rights of nationalities, but only of citizens with different languages? On this foundation, peace between Germans and Czechs can never, ever be established. Therefore, to put it briefly: The Germans want to be loyal citizens of this state, but only at the price of recognition of our nationality as equal within the state. As equals among equals, they request political, national and cultural self-administration. As domiciled citizens on land they have long since held, they request full political freedom in their historical areas of inhabitancy. And with this, everything has been said." [*Lebensbilder...* 1981: 269-270.]

According to Ralf Dahrendorf, the citizen, as a social result of modernisation, expressing the historic transformation of feudal society with its patrimonial order into a modern society, had not yet superseded the subject in German society. The recipient of social rights and responsibilities in the German Weimar constitution was not the citizen

(as in the majority of democratic institutions) but the German (with ethnic bonds). While the citizen did not suffer from the idea of having second class people around him, the very concept of the *Herrenvolk* gave rise to the idea that other races were inferior. In the German system, the citizen had a deeply disturbing and destructive effect [Dahrendorf 1968: 73,83,84]. This very aspect of a person, a citizen with natural rights, is prominent in the speech (the second of our two compared statements) given by the President, Dr. E. Beneš, on January 15th, 1938 to Czech students at Academic House in Prague. It was headed "The strength of our democracy springs from the strongest national traditions" [Venkov 16. 1. 1938: 1]: "Be very critical and wary of everything that comes to you in today's disrupted world from left and right as Messianic theories or Messianic solutions to the troubles of today. Beware of blind admiration, but also be wary of blind judgement and criticism."

"The spiritual foundation of our democracy is based then on one philosophical and ethical principle: the subject of political life here is man, the individual in his humanity, and not party, class nor even just nation, that is to say no collective (...) I have always stood against that basically materialistic sociological theory that creates from various social collectives independent social organisms, set above and prioritised before the individual. Therefore, I am also against all so-called totalitarianism in societal activities, economics or politics today."

Each statement expresses a different political culture: the first a standpoint derived from the collective principle, regarded in expert literature as anti-democratic. The second corresponds to the classic concept of democracy as a historical configuration derived from the principle of citizenship, from natural human rights. Each of these standpoints advocated by representatives of different nations, Czechs and Germans, who lived side by side in a state that was regarded a historical-geographical (the Kingdom of Lands of the Czech Crown) and economic unit with one of the oldest borders in Europe, and which was respected also by the British representatives at the peace conference of 1919.

In a period of two decades, at the start of which Mayr-Harting's article appeared, and at the end of which Beneš's speech was given, in policy statements from German activist parties aimed at party development – where some influence of democracy might be expected, for example, in the party press, we find proof that, while a certain change occurred in the practical forms of political coexistence of Czechs and Germans in the most propitious period, there was no change (and there could not be, because it concerned deep roots) in political culture on the German side during this short period. This political culture was distinguished mainly by anti-democratic thinking, which incorporated a negative value orientation and attitude towards democracy. Under the Habsburg monarchy, this political culture was historically reinforced by the fact that there were fewer Germans than Slavs in the state.

This is not to presume that differences in world-view need necessarily be a cause of conflict between those who advocate them, or that such views should make their coexistence impossible. They are, however, a form in which conflicts may occur in troubled times. For opposing or enemy forces they can be appealed to and misused. The foreign enemy in Nazi Germany, attempting to dismantle the Czechoslovak state, in which varied political cultures were represented, had the ground prepared. The conciliation between Czechs and Germans that arose in Czechoslovakia in the short period of European stability was not an expression of change in either German political culture or the activist part

of the German political spectrum. Agreement to co-operate was reached only in the legislative body and in the government coalitions, without the parties foregoing their opinions on society.

There is no room here for an analysis of the anti-democratic ideas that developed in (not only) the German environment from the end of the 19th century. On the basis of documentation of the activities of the German political parties subscribing to activism in the First Czechoslovak Republic, I will try to characterise the anti-democratic thinking and also partially outline the anti-democratic thinking that was the outlet for anti-democratic values and attitudes. I think it useful to at least name the basic terms, which have of course a wider context: the people/nation, solidarity, nation, organism, decision, new policy, new freedom, National Socialism (*Volk, Gemeinschaft, Nation, Organismus, Entscheidung, die neue Politik, die neue Freiheit, der nationale Sozialismus*), and to refer to the basic work of Kurt Sontheimer [1983]. The wider circumstances will be interpreted on the basis of an analysis of party texts and statements.

Among both activist and negativist Germans, the anti-democratic political culture with anti-democratic concepts remained the same, connected to a deeper level – that of a political score [Rohe 1990], and derived from traditions associated with the population's way of thinking and living in previous centuries. The documents of three activist political parties of the period will be examined to see how they accord with or diverge from the Czech democratic context of the day.

### **Social Democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic**

*The ethnic concept of nation (as opposed to the Western concept of the political nation that emerged in the anti-feudal revolution) and democracy*

Josef Seliger, leader the German Social Democratic Party that was established after the struggle for self-determination had been lost, had been carried on the wave of pan-German patriotism at the outset of the First World War. On August 6th, 1914, an article by Seliger appeared in the newspaper *Freiheit*. The article titled *Das Einige Deutschland* (The United Germany) was in line with the war aims of Germany. After the declaration of the Czechoslovak State, Seliger insisted on the right of self-determination of the Sudeten Germans, despite the fact that U.S. President Wilson had not called for self-determination for national minorities, but for the suppressed nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Bolsheviks had also requested the right of self-determination for the nations suppressed by Czarist Russia. In the name of a provincial government, on November 4th, 1918, Seliger attempted to reach an agreement with the Czechs on the ethnic division of the Czech lands. Due to the incompatibility of legal opinions, the hearings were dismissed. The representatives of the German Social Democrats, among them Josef Seliger representing the district administrator R. Lodgman, participated in the secessionist movement of the German population. This was mainly concerned with an attempt to participate in the elections for the parliament of the German-Austrian Republic (the Austrian lands after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire), although the politicians there had not reckoned with elections on Czechoslovak soil. The ideas that the Social Democrats proposed in their programme were in contradiction not only with the ideas for building a democratic Czechoslovak state, but also with contemporary opinions on how the state should be conceived. According to this programme, the Czechoslovak Republic was a

creation of entente imperialism<sup>3</sup> and the aim of the party was to overthrow the counter-revolutionary nature of this state. *The aim of the Social Democrats was the victory of Socialism; democracy and parliamentarism was for them the protection of the bourgeoisie against the dictatorship of the proletariat.* [Sozialdemokrat 18. 10. 1935: 1]

*The Czechoslovak state as a bourgeois, i.e. a formal democracy. The priority of supporting parliamentary democracy in the face of National Socialism*

Despite its proclaimed programme and initial negative attitude, the party eventually developed a positive position towards the Czechoslovak state, which for them represented, in the mid-1930's, a "bourgeois, i.e. formal democracy", which the Social Democratic Party originally had in its manifesto before the First World War and which was to become the basis of the changeover to social democracy [Lebensbilder... 1981, 2: 194]. In national affairs, this party was less radical than the non-Marxist parties. Some German politicians considered it indifferent to nations [Sudetendeutschtum... 1936: 36-37]. Its isolation from the other parties was regarded as a weakening of a unified German policy.

After the parliamentary elections of 1929, the German Social Democrats entered the Udržal government. Their leading politician, Dr. Ludwig Czech, became Minister of Social Affairs. In further governments he served as Minister for Public Works and Minister for Public Health and Physical Education up to April 11th, 1938 (he handed in his resignation on March 25th, i.e. six months before the end of the First Republic).

In 1935, the share of votes of the German Social Democratic Party fell to the benefit of Henlein's Sudeten German Party, though less dramatically than that of the other activist parties. Their support fell by almost half, from 6.9% to 3.6%. Henlein characteristically opened the election campaign "as a Saar plebiscite, a plebiscite of appurtenance towards either this state or Germany" [Sozialdemokrat 4. 12. 1935]. In the spirit of National Socialism he worked on the political sentiment of the German population and used its nationalism as the most significant element. The anti-democratic thinking of the time was not rational in its reactions, but leant on concepts such as *Volk, nation, solidarity* and so forth, which, like the entire German political language and thinking, acquired a magical content. And there led the easiest path to influencing the electorate.

Henlein's party, in the gradual pursuit of German voters, heavily emphasised and repeated in party literature the thesis that the Germans had seen an economic rise "in neighbouring Germany since Hitler came to power in 1933" [Náčrt... 1996: 17]. This does not correspond to developments in Germany, where the crisis had already passed its deepest point before Hitler, during the time of Chancellor Brüning, nor do contemporary newspaper reports (the *Sozialdemokrat*) confirm that the German population, suffering an economic crisis in the Czechoslovak Republic, could see affluence across the border in Hitler's Germany.

A certain hesitation by the Social Democrats with regard to their relationship with democracy is evident in the argument that occurred in the fall of that year as to whether dictatorship of the proletariat or mere democracy was a better basis for the realisation of socialism. The solution was influenced by the standpoint of the Communist *Internationale*, which gave priority to the maintenance of bourgeois democracy rather than National

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<sup>3</sup>) That is, the result of the will of the Allied powers at the Versailles peace conference.

Socialism. Also in this respect, a declaration of German Social Democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic was approved.

The aim of the party was therefore to “maintain this state as the last democratic bastion in fascisised Europe, to maintain it as a democratic state for the workers until the fascist twilight of the Gods”. The defence of democracy (including Czechoslovak democracy) became the interest of all European proletariats [*Sozialdemokrat* 18. 10. 1935: 1]. The defence of freedom within a democratic republic was for the Social Democrats the defence of the freedom of the working class to the extent that it was possible in the republic. Therefore, they defended democracy against neighbouring and internal fascism. They considered it the fulfilment of their role in the particular political situation.

The attitudes adopted by the German Social Democrats in the mid-1930's are best observed in the resolutions of their conference in the autumn of 1935. They declared support for democracy as a better system than fascism in the name of freedom and peace.

#### *The differences between two political cultures, and the demand for equal rights of nationalities*

Of all the German activist parties, the German Social Democrats understood best the differences between the two political cultures: “Czechoslovak democracy and German totalitarianism mix like fire and water.” They perceived the absurdity of an ideology founded on the doctrine of race, a pagan cult, nationalist ideas and a class ideology standing in contrast to the real political life of society in Czechoslovakia, which was founded on a share in government [*Sozialdemokrat* 3. 12. 1935: 1]. They did not, however, understand the antipathy of the cultures enough to amend their *demand for the equality of nations* within the Czechoslovak Republic. This was formally sufficiently close to their class ideology, which also concerned *not the freedom of the individual (the citizen) but the liberation of a collective (a class)*.

#### *War and peace*

Other articles published in the newspaper *Sozialdemokrat*, such as ‘*Die Mission unseres Staates*’, indicate the ability of the Social Democrat publicists to differentiate between various doctrines: Beneš's peace policy speech was for them proof that, for the Czechoslovak president, the purpose of all history was continual progress towards humanity. “The struggle for peace is a struggle for democracy, a struggle against crisis.” In contrast to this, anti-democratic doctrines explained *war as an expression of the dynamism of society, as an element of the expansion of life, as a struggle against the stagnation of life*. They also placed in the forefront the old concept of the *Herrenvolk* and the *Herrenrasse*, the concept of the pure race and racism. Accordingly, mankind was divided into *inferior and superior nations*. Superior nations were accorded greater rights and war was seen as the natural instrument for achieving the greater rights of the nation and the state. In Europe at that time, certain doctrines viewed war in this way, especially those of authoritarian regimes. Dr. Beneš also took a stand on this issue stating that there exists no pure race, no *Herrenvolk* nor *Herrenrasse*. The headline used by the *Sozialdemokrat* for the above-mentioned article was an expression of Social Democracy's understanding of Czechoslovakia's message in the given situation [*Sozialdemokrat* 24. 11. 1935: 1], which, however, the other Sudeten Germans did not follow.

*The organic concept of democracy. The constitution of nationalities as subjects of constitutional law. Mechanical concepts.*

While understanding the sense of the stability of voters being shared between political parties and the necessity for both German and Czech democrats to attempt to maintain nationalist peace between Czechs and Germans [Ibid.: 5], Wenzel Jaksch reiterated the organic concept of democracy. The fundamental principle of this concept was the demand for the “*constitution of nationalities as [equal] subjects of constitutional law (...)* *Instead of the mechanical concept* (as anti-democratic thought termed the majority principle in democracy), *which aspires to the equal rights of all citizens*” [Krofta a Sobota 1937: 47-48. Not italicised in the original]. According to Jaksch, this theory was formulated in old Austria in the interest of the German nationals, who did not form a majority in the country, but played a privileged role due to prerogatives in administration.

In Jaksch's speech, and even more so in the writings of the Social Democratic press of the period, perceptible signs of loyal attitudes towards Czechoslovak democracy can be found. But there is still an apparent attempt to adapt the concept of democracy to anti-democratic thinking (mechanical and organic concepts), which was to a certain extent shared by the Social Democrats. It is an attempt in quite a pure form to infiltrate the collective into democracy as a subject, in this case the nation instead of the citizen, and thus to solve the problem of the ‘mechanical’ majority in democracy, which the German nation felt threatened by under the Habsburg monarchy as it did in Czechoslovakia. This collectivism and the criticism of liberal democracy as “mechanical and quantitative” [Mussolini 1935: 82], was at the beginning of the century intrinsic to socialism, also as a corporate principle, in consequence leading towards fascism and National Socialism. It was part of the anti-democratic trends of 20th century Europe, whether right-wing totalitarianism (Nazism) or left wing (Communism) [Talmon 1965: 1-13].

*The Swiss model. The civic principle and the national principle*

The appeal to Switzerland and the spirit of the Swiss constitution in the case of the Teplice plan of action of the Social Democrats represented a misunderstanding of the Swiss state and the Swiss constitution [Broklová 1994b], and was justifiably perceived as evidence of the nationalism of the German Social Democrats. It is extraordinary with what tenacity the ‘Swiss model’ continually appeared in contemporary publications that claimed to be expert, without the verification of basic facts. In the case of Switzerland there was no successful solution to the coexistence of a number of nationalities, as Jaksch stated, but rather a political agreement between cantons. The language question was solved by giving equal rights to the languages. The nation was Swiss (already at a time when Czech politicians took it as a model), followed by the citizenship of individual cantons, not individual nations. The boundaries of nationality cut across the cantons. All Swiss citizens (and not collectives) enjoy equal political rights.

Jaksch judged that “the Germans have little prospects of such important questions being addressed from the point of view of their interests. Therefore, it will not be possible to abandon the future coexistence of Czechs and Germans to the *mere mechanical application of democratic precepts...*” [author's italics]. He sees the solution as a historical task: “Much depends on whether the Czech nation succeeds in rising above the pre-war situation of the ‘national’ enemy, the German, and to think and behave as a nation state.” [Krofta a Sobota 1937: 54].

Here Jaksch has neglected the concentrated efforts of the Czech democratic politicians, particularly T. G. Masaryk, to include the Germans in the executive, even when they did not have the necessary share of the vote after the parliamentary elections of May 1935, and the attempt to make them fellow citizens in the open Czechoslovak democratic society [Broklová 1998]. His way of thinking rendered him incapable of appreciating this fact.

### ***Bund der Landwirte (The Agricultural Union)***

#### *Self-determination and proportional representation in the executive and administration*

Like the Social Democrats, this German party also called for self-determination in 1920. At variance with them, the party also called for proportional representation in the Czech government and public service, for a revision of laws and for self-administration of the municipalities in individual administrative regions.

#### *The opposition of the BdL to "the method of government and administration here". The priority of the ethnic collective above the freedom of the individual*

In the German parliamentary club, its first chairman, Franz Krepek, who had a good relationship with President Masaryk, succeeded in gaining allies for the idea of an active policy. The Member of Parliament for the *Bund der Landwirte*, Slavist Franz Spina, was convinced that the Czechs would never give up the border regions they had acquired through the victorious powers.<sup>4</sup> He avowed himself to the new state with the firm intention of winning, by collaboration, a place for the German minority on the political scene. Nevertheless, he expressed opposition to "the method of government and administration here". The German agricultural representatives demanded for individual Germans and for the entire German population such status in the state, according to democratic principles, as they required to maintain their life [Scholz 1928: 18]. The peace pact, however, offered states the protection of members of minorities as state citizens and not of minorities as collectives. The prioritising of the ethnic collective above the freedom of the individual in a democratic society, which was manifest in all of the German activists, is part of anti-democratic thinking and is to be found in all the policy documents of this party too.

### **Appurtenance to the German nation**

The appurtenance to the German nation felt also by Franz Spina was natural, although at the time it was an impediment to incorporation into the Czechoslovak political nation: "We really feel like citizens of a great sixty million-strong nation, since we are joined to these people by language and culture, which is a requisite for integration and a characteristic part of human civilisation..." [Scholz 1928: 18].

#### *The United Parliamentary Club. Political parties*

The very existence of the United Parliamentary Club, of which Franz Spina was vice-chairman, was, in the initial period of the state, an expression of the will of German politicians not to recognise the representation of the German people by political parties. It was an attempt by German politicians at the unified representation of the German popu-

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<sup>4</sup>) The border regions of the Czech Lands belonged to the Czech Kingdom. From the 13th century onwards they were settled by German colonists on the invitation of Czech kings.

lation. The lack of faith in parliamentary representation was so marked that the dominant opinion among the German farmers was that the BdL, negotiating with the government (at the end of 1919), represented not all the farmers, but only those who were organised in the Union [*Deutscher...* 24. 12. 1919 according to *Sozialdemokrat* 3. 1. 1920: 1]. K. Henlein presented an analogous opinion fifteen years later, when he voiced the thesis that Czech farmers had different interests to those of the German farmers.

#### *The right to self-determination of nations within the state*

On November 18, 1925, in a newly-elected Parliament, F. Spina called for the right to self-determination of nations within the state. However, several months later, on the basis of his activist thinking, he was prepared to show his loyalty to the state as a future minister. It is difficult to reconcile both principles, because, if the Germans were not to accept Masaryk's proposal of self-determination within Czechoslovakia, the realisation of the right of self-determination would mean the break-up of the state. Temporarily, however, the willingness to share in the executive contributed to the stability of the democratic regime.

#### *Share in Government*

From 1926 until the spring of 1938, German politicians shared in government and executive power. The internal politics of the state thus gained a new firm footing, with both economic and political stability. President Masaryk referred to the creation of the Czech-German coalition as a historic moment. The Germans regarded their entry into the government as an opportunity to make joint decisions on their own fate and improve their lot. Spina was the author of the opinion that the Germans should attune themselves to the Czechoslovak state.

#### *The arguments of the negativists<sup>5</sup>*

Spina evidently achieved his greatest successes in his promotion of activist politics. He himself regarded negativism as sterile in principle, but sometimes employed the arguments of the negativists to bring activism to the Czechs. The main obstacle to a settlement between the Czechs and Germans Spina saw in the "pernicious, petty and, precisely because of its pettiness, exasperating, *pin-pricking* policy" [Scholz 1928: 179]. The activist parties and their representatives in government were soon confronted with the most difficult problems of internal politics. With the outbreak of the world economic crisis a period of dangerous developments began. Poverty and unemployment, particularly in the German areas with its predominant secondary export industry, led to tremors in internal politics. The activist parties were also affected. Spina tried to ensure that activism did not collapse under the weight of these problems.

#### *Konrad Henlein's Movement. The nation as the agent of history. National solidarity*

In October 1933 Konrad Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront* was formed as a new collective political party, though its name gave the appearance of it not being a party but a political movement. The fact that Henlein named his party a 'movement' was exactly in accordance with anti-democratic thinking and that of Hitler. Like most conservative ideologists of the time, Hitler saw the nation as the *agent of history*. The nation

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<sup>5</sup>) The German negativist parties rejected any kind of co-operation with Czechoslovak political parties.

rather than the state was the basis in anti-democratic thought. The state was only the external organisation of the nation. The life will of the nation in its political form was concentrated in a movement, a party. Hitler preferred the term movement, since he wanted to distinguish his party from the 'systemic parties' (i.e. parties connected to a democratic system) of the German Weimar Republic [Sontheimer 1983: 137-138]. Likewise Henlein. Only in 1935 was the *Sudetendeutsch Heimatfront* (SHF) renamed as a party, so that it could participate in parliamentary elections. Unlike other politicians of his leaning, Franz Spina rejected the new party. He rightly feared that the party would find itself under Hitler's thumb and foresaw catastrophic developments for Germany and the Sudeten Germans. He was driven by the idea that he had to do something to save the democratic traditions of the Sudeten Germans. In 1935, after unsuccessful negotiations between the *Bund der Landwirte* and the SHF, during the pre-election campaign the SHF declared itself as the only party that could solve the problem of the second liberation of the peasantry. It also asserted that: "The problem of the peasant can only be solved by national solidarity." [*Deutsche...* 2. 4. 1935: 2]. And that, in the Czechoslovak state, Germans could not settle the interests of individual groups, since they did not have power in their hands. It was not German national solidarity that contributed chiefly and decisively to finding solutions, but rather the Czech parties. According to the SHF, analogous difficulties did not occur to the same extent in a purely national (not multinational) state. The main political course of action offered by anti-democratic thought had been formulated. Now it was only a matter of whether the electorate would accept it.

As opposed to *national solidarity* (*Volksgemeinschaft*), which was the aim of Henlein's party, the *Bund der Landwirte* emphasised that "in every nation the only basis on which national solidarity can be built" is the peasant estate, which firmly maintains the independence of its political formation. Both parties, then, were interested in the realisation of "*Sudeten German national solidarity*". This very fact is significant from the point of view of the function of political culture in the defection of activist voters and later also politicians to the platform of Henlein's party. The German agrarian newspaper had already distinguished this, when it wrote that the SHF's former allies from the *Bund der Landwirte* could, for this reason, join with them and now fight against the BdL by the foulest means [Ibid.: 3].

#### *The united Sudeten German front*

On April 5th, 1935 the slogan "Peasant beware!" appeared in the German agrarian newspaper. The author warned against the belief "that a golden age will begin for (...) Sudeten Germans with the realisation of the united Sudeten German front." Despite all the fervent and fiery phrases, recognition of the actual conditions should remain decisive for the tactics of the Sudeten Germans [*Deutsche...* 5. 4. 1935: 3].

#### *Priorities: The peasant and the German. The German and the peasant*

On May 19th, 1935 an election proclamation was published, which defended the *Bund der Landwirte* with an emphasis on the peasant class: "The freedom of the peasant is the freedom of the nation (*Volk*), the freedom of the homeland." The modest promises of the BdL stand in contrast to Henlein's promise that he would do everything that needed to be done. Elsewhere is quoted Spina's opinion, which corresponds with Masaryk's idea at the beginning of the state, that the same nationalist clashes would be carried over into clashes between classes and social groups: "the national problem is first

and foremost social and economic! This means: First and foremost you are a peasant, a worker, a businessman, an employee, etc., and only then a German. Konrad Henlein, on the other hand, says: "You are first and foremost a German and you must try to remain a German! Only then are you a peasant, a worker, a businessman, an employee, etc." [*Deutsche...* 19. 5. 1935: 1]. This quotation can be regarded as evidence of Spina's real policy, which applied German agrarian activism. Interests could be represented in a democratic concept in Parliament and in government. Henlein's party, however, which eventually enticed the BdL voters over to its side, wanted in its anti-democratic thinking to represent the nation as a whole.

#### *The populist collectivist programme*

Attempts at an active policy representing the interests of the peasant class, however, found fewer and fewer adherents. Compared to 1925, when the German agrarian party held 24 seats in Parliament, their number fell to five after the elections in 1935. The other activist parties fared no better. From this time on these parties were regarded as cleavage parties. They did not have a programme that could stand up against the populist collectivist programme of Henlein's Sudeten German Party, which proclaimed their demands aloud in terms that were closer to their way of thinking.

#### *The end of activism*

On March 16th, 1938 it was decided at a meeting of the BdL leadership in Prague that the party would leave the headquarters of the German activist parties. Minister Spina, who shortly thereafter tendered his resignation, was rebuked for not representing the national interests of the Sudeten Germans with sufficient energy.

#### *"The organic coexistence of equal persons and nations"*

A contribution from BdL representative G. Hacker to a publication issued by K. Krofta and E. Sobota in 1937 [Krofta and Sobota 1937], is noteworthy with regard to the use of terminology. It dealt with German farmers and the nationality question. Democracy defined as the "organic coexistence of equal persons and nations, responsibly led by their men, the best of their time" [Ibid.: 18] does not reflect the formal principles of the structure of this arrangement of society. It is a fabricated definition: no division of power (the totalitarian state in Friedrich Georg Jünger's theory rejected the division of power [Sontheimer 1983: 209]) – no sovereignty of the people, nothing of the principle of appointment by elections, but the application of some sort of leadership principle (even though Hans Kelsen considered the absence of a leadership class as a positive sign of democracy [Ibid.: 221]). The opportunist use of the term democracy is evident at a time when even dictators declared themselves for democracy (Mussolini). The emphasis on organic coexistence is reminiscent of the concept of the organic (*das Organische*) in anti-democratic thinking. The equal coexistence of people and nations is brought together by the application of democratic principles in society and between states. The coexistence of equal people and nations, by which Hacker defines democracy, pushes the meaning of democracy towards National Socialism. In his logic the equality of nations is slipped into the definition. According to National Socialism, all the resources of the state serve the nation (*Volk*), *the individual is transient (impermanent), while the nation remains, and the idea of humanity is at base an excuse for weak nations* [Ibid.: 138].

### *The question of nationality*

Hacker considered the question of nationality the most pressing problem of Czechoslovak democracy [Krofta and Sobota 1937: 19]. According to Hacker, placing emphasis on the connection between the Sudeten Germans and one of the largest European nations, “our state shows its abuse of this problem in excessive dependence on political situations abroad”. Some Czech circles live “under the influence of a *fallacious idea of the German peril* [authors italics] – which they themselves helped to create step by step - as if it were really to happen one day” [Ibid.: 22]. This dismissal of the German peril is contradicted by certain realities of the time: on May 2nd, 1935 the German Ministry of War completed a study titled “*Schulung*” (education), which deals with a plan of attack against the Czechoslovak Republic. On June 24th, 1937 the German war ministry published a directive for united war preparations, in which the possibility of a preventative war against Czechoslovakia was also discussed [Ibid.: 22].

### *The closed German society in the Czechoslovak state*

The preservation of living space for a numerically weaker nation [Ibid.: 20] (by which is meant the German minority in Czechoslovakia) was in reality the constantly repeated demand for a closed German society within the Czechoslovak state, to which the Czechs would not have access. This measure was not compatible with the open democracy of Czechoslovakia.

### *The equal rights of nations and citizens. Collective rights*

The interpretation of equality in a democracy as the equal right to hold official offices according to nationality, etc., is a formal assent to democracy. It is, however, a misinterpretation of the democratic principle of equal rights as equal opportunities for all citizens, not collectives, and the principle of proportional elections, which was to ensure a significant political current in the population’s participation in the legislative bodies.<sup>6</sup>

The opinion that democracy would be led out of the crisis by the application of the principle of practical equal rights of nations, within Czechoslovakia of course, and not between states, was a result of the traditional German emphasis on collective rights (in the 19th century H. Treitschke<sup>7</sup> had called for equal rights for the working class).

The postulation that Czechoslovakia should be an example of a *perfect democracy* [Ibid.: 21] is reminiscent of the idealistic demands of the critics of the German Weimar Republic (*Besservisser*) on democracy, which could not be fulfilled and which led to its demise.

### *The unification of the European nations. The end of the nation state*

According to Hacker, “our state has a vocation (...) to (...) lead the path to the unification of the European nations.” This call, too, for a regionalised, unified Europe belongs to the tradition of anti-democratic ideas about the arrangement of the continent, which was to ensure the hegemony of the German nation. It was an idea that the era of the nation state was gone, that a new era must be hoped for, in which the nations would create the foundation of a new European state system (a system of states) [Ibid.: 21].

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<sup>6</sup>) Proportionality as a desirable political principle of representation was laid down by Victor Considérant in 1846.

<sup>7</sup>) Heinrich Treitschke 1834-1896, German publicist and historian.

### *The national party*

“The Farmers’ Union is no less national than any other national party” and “it does not, one way or another, put regional interests before those of the nation.” [Ibid.: 23]. This portion of Hacker’s contribution is a defence of the *Bund der Landwirte*, because, in the anti-democratic concept of the nation, parties and classes *represented a factor acting against the unity of the nation*. Characteristic for the anti-democratic movement, however, was the emphasis on peasant interests.

### **The German Christian-Social People’s Party**

#### *The German*

The Christian Socialists felt the struggle for self-determination to be an unimaginably painful part of their political existence [*Lebensbilder...* 1981, 4: 268]. When it became evident to them that their attempts were in vain, Mayr-Harting formulated conditions for the loyalty of the Germans to the Czechoslovak state, which were previously referred to. His *German* is not the citizen of modern history, but merely part of a nation. As such, he requests the recognition of the German nation as equal within the state, i.e. a right for a collective. Mayr-Harting’s *domiciled citizen*, whose characteristic is his residence on the land, and not a claim for civil rights, requests “political freedom in all his historic areas of inhabitancy...” [*Lebensbilder...* 1976, 4: 269-270]. From other demands it is evident that these areas were to be closed to the penetration of Czech elements (as with the penetration of Italians to South Tyrol).

In contrast to the other political parties, anti-Semitism (against Jewish hegemony) was characteristic of this party’s programme. The party also persisted in anti-Czech attitudes and their aim was to gain national self-administration. Here again the aforementioned Swiss model and canton system is repeated. It should also not be neglected that autonomy was for the German National Socialists a step towards self-determination, as declared later particularly by Hitler.

A new stage can be noted in the development of the Christian Socialists in connection with the emergence of Henlein’s movement and subsequent party. At the same time, the party felt threatened by Henlein’s slogan ‘*positive christianity*’ and wanted to settle the score with Henlein’s party. In the fall of 1935 the Christian Socialists declined to cooperate with the German nationalist parties in the new parliament. They expressed a wish to remain independent and did not want to sacrifice their claim to totality. The persecution of the Catholics in Germany, dating from the fall of the *Zentrum* Catholic party, evidently played a role in this policy. Because of this, the Christian Socialists’ co-operation with Henlein was unsustainable in terms of both internal and foreign policy.

#### *The rights of democracy*

In 1934, we can see Mayr-Harting’s critical attitude to democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic. He judged that it was a situation close to a dictatorship of parties, to an illusory democracy (*Scheindemokratie*): “democracy without discussion, a democracy that is no longer a democracy. (...) Therefore, we must fight for a true democracy, because only that offers us the security necessary for the achievement of our aims. Let it be said clearly once and for all: We are dependent only on ourselves” [Mayr-Harting 1934: 13]. Once again an attitude not dissimilar to that of the critics of parliamentary democracy in Weimar Germany.

The text of Mayr-Harting's 1934 pamphlet "The Path and the Goals of Sudeten German Politics" (*Weg und Ziele der Sudetendeutschen Politik*) offers a great deal of evidence of anti-democratic thinking, which was obviously in contradiction with his declared attempts at democracy. Here there is also a proposal for the simplification of the party system by means of *supporting the class notion in the interest of uniting the nation* (which is divided by political parties). By class is meant class according to profession and not a one-sided representation of interests [Ibid.: 18]. Mayr-Harting does not demand the dissolution of parties, which he regards as part of the construction of authoritarian systems, but his demand is still anti-democratic. It was precisely on this that authoritarian and fascist regimes were founded. In a democracy, the founding principle of a political party is political and not class based. Integration must take place within a universally political, open principle. The demand for the representation of classes is an attempt to slip the pre-modernisation situation into conditions in which it acts anti-democratically. Politics in this concept is not understood as a conflict of interests, but as a tight collaboration between existing parties (in the simplified system) in the nationalist respect. According to the Christian Socialists, "It is on any account the only possible path to the *political unification of the Sudeten Germans*" [authors italics.] [Ibid.: 19]. Unification was to be carried out by the Christian Socialists. In reality this anti-democratic idea paved the way first for Henlein and then for Hitler.

A mixture of principles emerging from the Czech constitution and the precepts of Christian Socialism forms Hilgenreiner's "Policies of the German Christian Socialist People's Party of the Czechoslovak Republic." *Freedom and rights* are demanded for collectives. Like the other critics of democracy in the inter-war period, they demand *true* democracy and *true* democrats. "The renewal of the class order is a social aim" is the content of a Papal Bull of May 15th, 1931. The encyclical is directed against an "unnatural, violent estate in society: (...) members of the social organism group [themselves] together in the form of the ranks to which they belong, not according to whether they belong to one side or another of the labour market, but rather according to their social profession. Because just as local (neighbouring) appurtenance entices people into a community, membership of the same profession makes it possible to amalgamate classes according to profession or class-occupational corporations." [Hilgenreiner 1935: 21-22.] This demand is directed against the structure of modern society and its impact on the political system is an expression of anti-democratic thinking. It suits down to the ground the Christian-Socialist notions of society: the individual of the liberal labour market has to be firmly placed within the class hierarchy. This demand consequently turns against the class parties if they are not only economic, but also want to act in politics. "It must be the whole nation. Only parties that include the whole nation, all classes, only national parties (*Volksparteien*) can be political parties." [Ibid.: 21-22]. Instead of this, as in the Weimar Republic, those parties that were not capable of creating a democratic policy for the whole of society created room here and there for Hitler's and Henlein's parties.

If we are to assume that the population paid attention to these statements of the Christian-Socialist politicians, it must have devalued everything that the Germans had thus far undertaken in the state, including participation in government and activist politics, and consequently resulting in a shift in votes in favour of the party of Henlein, who appeared as a Messiah.

Characteristic of the period at the beginning of 1938 is a stumbling between the rejection of National Socialism, which was accompanied by the "Away from Rome!"

movement, and acceptance of its claims concerning the unification of the German nation, replacing the formal relationship with Berlin with a friendly one. The Christian Socialists continued, however, to reject the severance of the German areas because this would mean war [*Deutsche...* 11. 1. 1938: 4, 15. 3. 1938: 3]. In March 1938 the party recommended that its parliamentary representatives join the club of the Sudeten German Party, but the party formally retained its independence.

The mixture of verbal adherence to democracy, criticism of democracy from idealist positions and anti-democratic ideas in policies, tenets and aims, and the professed interest of the Christian-Socialist politicians in the conditions of a democratic state did not contain within themselves an unequivocal development towards an authoritarian or Nazi regime. Nonetheless, this mixture of ideologies created the preconditions for acceptance of such a regime, because it had in common a value orientation: a high regard for the nation, the valuing of the equal rights of nations (collectives) rather than citizens, anti-Semitism (race), criticism of democracy from idealist viewpoints and related to this a one-sided evaluation of the behaviour the Czech side (political pin-pricking), and an unawareness of problems running in the opposite direction. This attitude was further complicated by the specific clerical character of the party with regard to certain measures that are a feature of modern societies (marriage reform, pregnancy termination, laicisation of schools etc.). The demand for the rebuilding of political parties according to class was also undemocratic. Particularly in the parts concerning classes as components of the social organism, there are evident connections with Spannism, which is a significant element of anti-democratic thinking and doctrine.

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Czechoslovakia's historical experience confirms in the short-term the validity of the thesis of the possibility of coexistence of societies with different political cultures, if both sides enter an agreement on mutual non-destruction [Rustow 1970, according to Dvořáková and Kunc 1994] or on coexistence in the case of Czechoslovakia. The outcome, however, also confirms the correctness of President Masaryk's request for 50 years of peaceful development. Masaryk of course reckoned with the emergence of one political nation rather than the maintenance of two disparately oriented societies. In the long-term, the question emerges as to whether there exists any case at all in which the breaking of an agreement on mutual coexistence does not occur, and whether then the theory of the possibility of coexistence of societies with different political cultures is at all contradicted by the theory of the impossibility of coexistence of two political cultures [Gellner 1993]

#### *Concluding note*

This article emerged as part of a larger work that was as the outcome of an RSS project. In view of the fact that it has not yet appeared in print, I consider it necessary to emphasise that I am not reproaching the German parties for nationalism, nor that they did not understand the principle of the political nation and the principle of citizenship. There is no point in moralising on history. This is not the intention of this work. The aim was to investigate whether the activist parties' endorsement of the regime of the First Republic – activism, was underpinned by a change in political culture (or symptoms of such a change) that was perceptible in the attitudes of the German political parties at the beginning of the Republic. Without scrutinising the ideas of the German activists the endorse-

ment of a large part of the German population of Henlein's Sudeten German party in the 1935 elections cannot be explained.

The results of the analysis confirm the correctness of Masaryk's request for the need for 50 years of peaceful development for Czechoslovakia, in view of the predominantly disparate political cultures of the nations and nationalities in the Czechoslovak Republic and also the societies of the Czech and German nations themselves (concerning which, I expect that for further study this disparity did not affect only the Czech and German societies). It also shows the problematic nature of the coexistence of holders of a number political cultures, which is shown not only by history, but can also be observed in our present times.

I do not deal with Czech political culture, and therefore I do not mention it often. Nevertheless, I assume, particularly in view of the electoral failure of the Czech parties of the extreme right and left, and in view of the position of democracy in Czech historical development, that it is possible to speak of a predominantly democratic political culture. A study following up the political culture of the German activist parties will deal with Czech and German nationalism and political culture.

*Translated by Ondřej Formánek, John Comer*

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